The Vines

Dazed and confused Australian foursome offers Nirvana-flavored primitive rock & roll

TEXT BY NICK DUERDEN PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUSTIN STEPHENS

★ IN A NONDESCRIPT hotel room 11 stories above London, Craig Nicholls is looking dazed. This, it quickly becomes evident, happens often: He appears as confused over the presence of bacon in his club sandwich as he is when considering the hype his band, the Vines, has generated over the last few months.

"Am I surprised?" he asks. A shadow passes over his face. "Well, I guess I am. Yeah. I think so. In a way. I mean, yeah. Yeah." A slice of bacon slips from his sandwich. He watches it fall.

Made up of singer-guitarist Nicholls, 24, bassist Patrick Mathews, 26, acoustic guitarist Ryan Griffiths, 25, and new drummer Hamish Rosser, 28, the Vines are from Sydney, Australia — and sound unquestionably American. Their debut album, *Highly Evolved*, is a sparkling, ferociously energetic guitar-rock combination of the Ramones, Pavement and Nirvana; the first single, "Get Free," could easily be a newly charged version of Nirvana's posthumous 1996 hit "Aneurysm." Early reports have pitched them alongside the Strokes and the White Stripes as members of a rejuvenated underground-rock scene.

Nicholls and Mathews first met in a Sydney McDonald's "maybe six years ago," the singer guesses. He's fairly certain he and Mathews gravitated to each other because of their shared love of Kurt Cobain and John Lennon.

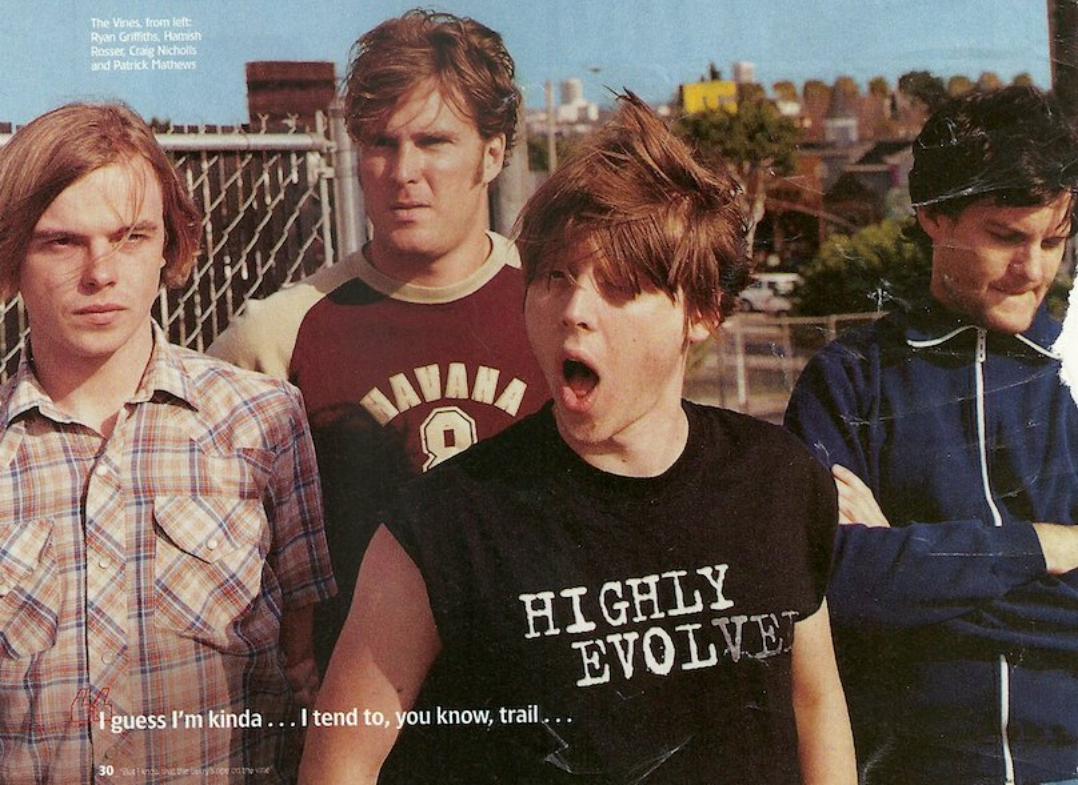
After an extended period of inactivity — punctuated by temporary jobs, local shows and artful contemplation — the two, along with longtime friend and drummer David Oliffe, found a manager and, on the strength of their first Australian single, "Factory," a record deal. Last year, they decamped to Los Angeles to record *Highly Evolved* with Beck's producer, Rob Schnapf. While Nicholls and Mathews enjoyed themselves, Oliffe went back to Australia.

"He didn't quit. He just went home early," Nicholls demurs. Though clearly, with Rosser now on board, Oliffe must be permanently out of the band? "I've been busy. I haven't had time to ask him."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Nicholls says he's only truly comfortable onstage. Only when playing music, he says, is he properly able to communicate.

"Other times, I guess I'm kinda . . . I tend to, you know, trail . . ." Off? "Yeah. I tend to trail off." With that, he's gone, unable to claw his way back. [BLENDER]

The Vines, from left: Ryan Griffiths, Hamish Rosser, Craig Nicholls and Patrick Mathews



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